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Security Council

Sixty-sixth year

Provisional

6636th meeting

Monday, 24 October 20[illegible]15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Ogwu	(Nigeria)
Members:	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Messone
	Germany	Mr. Berger
	India	Mr. Ahamed
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Gumbi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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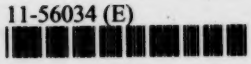

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh, Cuba, Ecuador, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Maldives, Malaysia, Morocco, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Turkey, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam to participate in this meeting.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 20 October 2011 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2011/653 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council that will be held on Monday, 24 October 2011, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Abdou Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: On 18 October, Israel and Hamas implemented the first stage of a prisoner exchange agreement. Israeli Sergeant Gilad Shalit, held in Gaza without international access since 25 June 2006, was released by Hamas. Four hundred and seventy-seven Palestinian prisoners — many of whom had been imprisoned for involvement in attacks on Israelis — were released, mostly to Gaza, but also to the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the occupied Syrian Golan and Israel proper. Forty-two prisoners were released to Turkey, Qatar, Syria and Jordan. In all, 205 prisoners were transferred, in accordance with the exchange agreement, to locations other than their residence before detention.

In their public remarks following the exchange, Hamas officials unfortunately and unacceptably lauded violent resistance, and some of the released prisoners made deplorable statements glorifying acts of violence. Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that Israel would continue to fight terrorism.

Approximately 5,000 Palestinians remain in Israeli prisons. A further 550 of these are to be released within two months in the second phase of the exchange agreement. Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails suspended a hunger strike the day before the prisoner exchange, following the reported agreement of the Israeli authorities to end solitary confinement. We continue to follow closely the security, political and human rights dimensions of the prisoner issue.

The Secretary-General, who had long called for an end of the unacceptable captivity of Gilad Shalit and for the release of Palestinian prisoners, welcomed the releases as a significant humanitarian breakthrough. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process actively supported channels of dialogue throughout that period. We reiterate the Secretary-General's thanks to Egypt for its contribution to this outcome, and to Germany for its efforts.

We have seen political will brought to bear to resolve a humanitarian issue, as well as a readiness in that context to take difficult decisions. We call for the same determination to be displayed with regard to the most important issue, namely, the quest for a lasting peace. The parties must rise to that challenge.

The Quartet statement of 23 September provides a framework for the parties to find a way forward. We welcome the separate meetings, expected to be held on 26 October, among negotiators from each side and Quartet envoys and the Quartet representative to agree on a method for proceeding in the negotiation. Special Coordinator Serry will participate in those meetings, and is in close dialogue with the parties in preparation for them. We remind the parties that the Quartet reaffirmed the international legal basis for peace talks and called for the parties to overcome the obstacles and resume negotiations without preconditions. The Quartet further called for proposals within three months on borders and security, with a view to achieving substantial progress within six months and an agreement no later than the end of 2012. The Quartet stressed the need for the parties to refrain from provocations and reiterated their Road Map obligations.

In that regard, we have registered our deep concern at Israel's settlement actions. The Israeli announcement of 1,100 East Jerusalem settlement units on the day that the Council last met was followed by the announcement, on 10 October, of 11 new housing units in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Pisgat Zeev. On 11 October, the Israeli authorities significantly advanced plans for the construction of approximately 2,600 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Givat Hamatos, which would amount to a new settlement in an area of vital importance for the viability of a two-State outcome.

The Israeli authorities are also not acting effectively against the construction of illegal outposts on private Palestinian land. On 14 October, the Secretary-General made clear that those developments were unacceptable and ran counter to the Quartet's call and Israel's commitments under the Road Map. I would remind the Council that settlement activity is illegal under international law and should cease. Unilateral actions on the ground will not be recognized by the international community.

At the same time, restrictions continue on land allocation and planning for Palestinian construction in Area C and East Jerusalem. Demolitions by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Area C during the reporting period displaced 145 people, including 81 children. We remain concerned at plans to relocate approximately 2,300 Bedouins in the vicinity of the so-called "E-1 corridor", connecting East Jerusalem to West Bank settlements.

The Palestinian application for United Nations membership is being examined by the Security Council, and is a matter for Member States. Also, the Palestinian request for membership in UNESCO is being reviewed before a vote by the General Conference. That step could have repercussions for the organization, as it has legal and political implications for the funding provided by some Member States. The Secretary-General is increasingly concerned about ramifications of such a step for the United Nations as a whole, and asks all involved to act wisely in determining a course of action. Regardless of those developments, a negotiated two-State solution, to which both leaders are committed, must remain the highest priority.

In the West Bank, both the application for statehood and the prisoner release evoked significant public demonstrations, but few acts of violence. Demonstrations against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, also largely remained peaceful. Coordination between the parties remains essential to maintain a secure environment.

However, tensions and violent incidents continue. Settler attacks on Palestinians resulted in one death and 19 injuries, including to five Palestinian children. Violent settlers especially targeted Palestinians harvesting their olive groves, and damaged 664 trees. Settlers also attacked an IDF patrol vehicle on 5 October, resulting in light injuries to an Israeli soldier. I urge the Israeli authorities to take decisive actions against acts of violence perpetrated by Israeli citizens. I also note that, on 3 October in Israel, a mosque was set on fire in the Upper Galilee village of Tuba Zangaria. That triggered unrest, vandalism and the arrest of local residents, as well as the subsequent desecration of Muslim, Christian and Jewish holy sites and property in several towns in Israel.

Palestinian attacks on Israelis in the occupied West Bank resulted in two injuries, including the stabbing of an Israeli child on 22 October, as well as extensive material damage, mostly from stones and Molotov cocktails thrown at Israeli vehicles. On 6 October, hundreds of Israeli pilgrims accompanied by the IDF in the Palestinian city of Nablus discovered swastikas painted on the exterior walls of Joseph's Tomb. On the same day, Israeli authorities arrested five Palestinians in connection with the stoning of a vehicle travelling in the West Bank on 23 September, which caused the death of the Israeli driver and his infant son.

Turning to Gaza, in spite of the fragile relative calm, six indiscriminate rockets and 13 mortar shells were fired by Palestinian militants into Israel during this reporting period, while two IDF incursions and five air strikes resulted in injuries to three Palestinian militants and two Palestinian civilians. We call for an end to militant rocket fire into Israel, maximum Israeli restraint and respect by all parties for international humanitarian law.

I echo the Secretary-General's expressed hope that the prisoner exchange will be followed by more far-reaching steps to end the closure of Gaza. Those steps should be taken within the framework of the full implementation of resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), and in close coordination with the Palestinian Authority.

In spite of the recent economic growth and the drop in unemployment in Gaza, the sustainability of that progress is unclear. Significant parts of the population remain food insecure and rely on humanitarian assistance. While agencies are implementing approved projects, ongoing restrictions limit the ability of the United Nations to support Gaza's economic recovery and reconstruction. There is a worrisome humanitarian and development vacuum that is being filled by other actors, fuelled by an illicit tunnel trade largely controlled by the de facto authorities.

That situation presents genuine concerns with regard to prospects for the emergence of a viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza, and deepens the Palestinian divide. We reiterate our call on Israel for more far-reaching steps to ease its land closures and facilitate the entry of construction materials into Gaza, exports and the free movement of people in both directions, with due consideration for Israel's legitimate security concerns. We also reiterate our call for weapons smuggling to be brought under control.

Notwithstanding inter-factional contacts, there has been no concrete progress towards the further implementation of the May reconciliation agreement. We reiterate our support for Palestinian reconciliation within the framework of Quartet principles, Palestinian Liberation Organization commitments and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Turning to Lebanon, I am pleased to report that the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has remained generally quiet and stable. UNIFIL recorded no major incidents or violations, except for continuing Israeli overflights of Lebanese airspace on an almost daily basis. I will not go into detail, as the Security Council will hear more in-depth briefings on Lebanon in the coming weeks.

Lebanon of course continues to be affected by developments in neighbouring Syria. In several instances during the month of October, the Syrian army opened fire across the border, carried out incursions into Lebanon and raided houses to capture fleeing nationals and army deserters. On 6 October, Syrian troops killed a Syrian national on Lebanese soil. The United Nations continues to coordinate closely with the Government of Lebanon on the provision of assistance to the displaced Syrian nationals who crossed into Lebanon fleeing violence, as well as on matters of protection and the determination of their status.

Those developments reflect the continuing political and human rights crisis in Syria, which has led to the deaths of more than 3,000 people since March. Unfortunately, signs are that the face-off between the regime and the opposition will continue, with all of the negative consequences for Syria and the region. This is of great concern to the United Nations. The Secretary-General continues to call on the Syrian leadership to take urgent action to stop the killing. He also continues to emphasize the need for the international community to act in a coherent manner to prevent further bloodshed. In that regard, we note that the League of Arab States met on 16 October to discuss the situation in Syria. The Arab League called for dialogue and established a follow-up committee. Its ministerial delegation will travel to Damascus on 26 October.

Turning back to the Israeli-Palestinian peace, let me conclude by emphasizing our deep concern at the impasse between the parties and its potential implications for the future. Leadership is urgently needed and the moderate Palestinian leadership must be supported. The parties must refrain from provocation and should stand ready to offer serious proposals on borders and security for negotiation. We urge them to approach their meetings with the Quartet envoys later this week in that spirit. Otherwise, the impasse will only deepen, and with it, the level of confrontation and the scale of mistrust. The international community must stand ready to play an active role in helping to steer the situation towards an agreement that resolves all final status issues, ends the occupation that began in 1967, ends the conflict and creates an independent and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel within secure and recognized borders.

The President: I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing. I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Palestine congratulates Nigeria on its skilled stewardship of the Security Council this month. We also express appreciation to Lebanon for its efficient presidency in September, including its responsible handling of Palestine's application for United Nations membership, which was conveyed to the Council on 23 September by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (see S/2011/592).

I also reiterate our appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing and for all the efforts being carried out by the Department of Political Affairs, including by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Palestine would like to convey its condolences to the people and Government of Turkey on the losses resulting from the earthquake that recently struck the country. We would also like to convey our condolences to the people and Government of Saudi Arabia on the death of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

We meet in this debate at a historic moment, when the Security Council is considering the application submitted by Palestine for admission as a Member State of the United Nations (S/2011/592). It is a moment long overdue in the tragic history of the Palestinian people and this prolonged conflict. And it is a moment requiring Council members to demonstrate the utmost responsibility in upholding their Charter duties and their legal obligations with regard to the question of Palestine, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

We believe that it would not be overstating the case to say that the Palestinian people, the peoples of the region and virtually the entire international community have joined in an appeal to the Council at this moment to do justice by Palestine and fulfil its role in the attainment of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution that will finally make peace and security a reality between Palestine and Israel and throughout the Middle East.

We reflect today on that which has brought us to this stage in our long quest to realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict. To date, 130 countries have recognized the State of Palestine. Those countries have taken a principled stand in support of our people's right to self-determination and in line with countless United Nations resolutions, from resolution 181 (II) of 1947 to the present. We are grateful for their recognition and support, which constitute an investment in peace consistent with the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, a solution that is internationally supported and endorsed.

At the same time, over the past two years, we have seen significant progress in the building and strengthening of Palestinian national institutions with the implementation of the Palestinian Authority's two-year plan to prepare our institutions and infrastructure for the independence of our State. It is a massive project, undertaken with the strong support and funding of countries from around the globe. Despite the many obstacles and the dysfunction caused by the Israeli occupation, this project has been a success, as affirmed by international institutions and as recently reflected in the 18 September conclusions of the Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, which reaffirmed that we are able to govern ourselves with viable, effective institutions that are above the threshold for a functioning State.

In addition to those two processes, we have witnessed the repeated and regrettable failures of the peace process. For nearly two decades, the negotiations

undertaken by the Palestinian leadership in a spirit of historic compromise and good faith have been undermined, obstructed and stalled as a direct result of Israel's intransigence, its egregious violations of international law and human rights and its refusal to commit to the most basic principles and parameters essential for the achievement of a just and lasting peace.

The consequences of its actions have not, however, been borne by the occupying Power, which continues to act with total impunity. Instead, they have been borne by generations of Palestinians, who continue to suffer the hardships of ongoing dispossession and exile and the brutality of the Israeli occupation in all of its manifestations; by the region, which continues to suffer from the insecurity and turmoil generated by this conflict; and by the international community, which continues to feel the wide-ranging impact of tensions and instability in the region and which continues, to no avail, to expend vast efforts and resources to resolve the conflict and alleviate its consequences.

All of those dynamics have led us to this moment — a moment in which we insist that international law and the relevant resolutions, including those of the Security Council, be upheld and that the status quo no longer be maintained, for it is unacceptable, illogical and unjust. That is what brought President Mahmoud Abbas to the United Nations on 23 September (see A/66/PV.19) with the application of the State of Palestine for admission as a Member State and his historic statement to the General Assembly on that day. Here, we express our deep appreciation to the United Nations Secretary-General and the Legal Counsel for verifying Palestine's application and conveying it without question to the Security Council for its consideration. We believe that this reflects the strength of Palestine's application and its fulfilment of the required criteria for this important step.

The Council has been debating our application for nearly a month, which we believe is sufficient time for its thorough consideration. We are aware of the deliberations taking place in the Committee on the Admission of New Members and express our gratitude for the principled positions of support affirmed by many delegations.

We also express appreciation for the efforts of the Non-Aligned Movement caucus of the Council in addressing this issue. It is time for the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities by approving our application and making a positive recommendation to the General Assembly for Palestine's admission to membership. That would be the most just and appropriate outcome of this process. We reiterate our belief that actions undertaken at the United Nations, the centre of multilateral activity in our world, can and must contribute towards the peace we all seek and will not obstruct the realization of this objective.

Of course, we are aware of the difficulties, but we cannot accept attempts to extend or postpone this exercise indefinitely at the expense of the merits of Palestine's application and its long overdue and rightful inclusion in the community of nations. We believe that this exercise should be brought to closure with a clear outcome. In this regard, we stress that we see no contradiction between the possibility of a resumption of negotiations between the two sides, which the Quartet is seeking to arrange, and the Security Council's responsible consideration of Palestine's application. In fact, these processes, which share the objective of actualizing the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, should be viewed as mutually reinforcing.

Palestine's recent efforts, including President Abbas's speech before the General Assembly and the submission of our application, have contributed to a growing momentum that underscores the urgency of bringing an end to the occupation that began in 1967. It is time for the Palestinian people to live in freedom and dignity and for a new era of peace and security to prevail in our region. That momentum, which led to the introduction of the French proposal by President Nicolas Sarkozy (see A/66/PV.11) and to the 23 September statement by the Quartet, has given added impetus to Governments and civil society worldwide to bolster their support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people at this critical time.

The Palestinian leadership's core understanding of the Quartet statement is that negotiations are to commence on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders and that Israel is expected to meet its legal obligations, including those under the Road Map, to halt all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Clearly, no credible peace process can proceed in the absence of such a

basic understanding. If the Quartet succeeds in securing a commitment from the Israeli side on this basis, then the Palestinian side is willing to resume negotiations in accordance with the agreed terms of reference reflected in the resolutions of this Council, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

Here, we reiterate that there is no contradiction between resuming negotiations in this framework and the Palestinian efforts to become a State Member of the United Nations. This is particularly clear, since the two-State solution enjoys global consensus and the aim of both processes is the long overdue independence of the Palestinian State — a right denied for over 63 years since partition — and the achievement of a just and lasting peace.

The current reality of the Israeli occupation and the situation of the Palestinian Authority cannot be sustained. Israel cannot continue to exploit and benefit from the occupation without consequences, absolved of its responsibilities as an occupying Power. Either the current situation must change, or Israel must assume full responsibility as the occupying Power. I would like to repeat that. Either the current situation must change, or Israel must assume full responsibility as the occupying Power. The status quo cannot be maintained as we move forward, for it is absolutely untenable.

Indeed, the situation on the ground continues to worsen and tensions continue to rise. In the midst of the serious diplomatic efforts being exerted by all concerned parties, Israel has instead intensified its illegal settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, gobbling up more Palestinian land with its construction and expansion of settlements and the wall, destroying more Palestinian homes and properties and displacing more Palestinian families, as well as permitting the terror rampages of the Israeli settlers against our civilians, their homes, their lands and trees, and their mosques. Such actions by Israel must be seen for what they are: a concrete, negative reaction to the efforts of the international community, including the Quartet, in favour of its occupation and expansionist annexation agenda.

How else can one explain the provocative and arrogant declarations in just the past three weeks regarding the construction of nearly 4,000 more settlement units? How else can one explain the deliberate planning and expansion of settlements and the attempts to entrench settlement outposts through legislation, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem and Bethlehem? All these measures are severing the northern and southern parts of the West Bank, encircling occupied East Jerusalem and separating it from its natural Palestinian environs, and totally undermining the contiguity and viability of our State. There is no justification for those illegal Israeli measures and no explanation for them other than that this Israeli Government is interested in neither the two-State solution nor in peace and security, and that it has chosen instead to continue its occupation and subjugation of an entire nation of people and to prolong the conflict.

That obstruction of peace has also been underscored recent days by the occupying Power's intensification of the mistreatment and abuse of the thousands of Palestinian civilians who remain imprisoned in its jails and detention centres. In a series of letters, we have drawn the Council's attention to their plight, including the hunger strike that began on 27 September, and we call on it to uphold international law vis-à-vis the situation of our prisoners. The international community, including the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, must demand that Israel comply with its legal obligations and cease its abuse of Palestinian prisoners — who include hundreds of children, some as young as 12 years old — and that the International Committee of the Red Cross be given unfettered access to them. In that regard, the recent prisoner exchange was a very important development. We welcome the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and await the release of the thousands of others who continue to unjustly languish in Israeli prisons.

Yet another unsustainable situation is the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has inflicted so much suffering on the Palestinian civilian population. All pretexts for continuing that illegal blockade must be rejected. The international community must unanimously demand that Israel fully lift the blockade and allow the sustained and unfettered movement of persons and goods into and out the Gaza Strip in order to permit the reconstruction of destroyed homes, properties and infrastructure, as well as the rehabilitation of our society there, which has been so damaged by that vicious form of collective punishment by the occupying Power.

The Palestinian leadership remains committed to peace and to negotiating seriously all final-status issues — the Palestine refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, security and water — when the appropriate environment is secured. However, we will not enter into negotiations for the sake of negotiations. The situation on the ground and the two-State solution itself are too fragile to withstand further delays and sabotage. Israel, the occupying Power, must be speedily compelled to commit to negotiations along the clear parameters to which we have already committed.

While committed to the peace process, we must reiterate clearly that the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, freedom and independence is not up for negotiation, nor will it be the product of negotiations. It is an inalienable right and the sole domain of the Palestinian people. It has never been an issue for negotiations with Israel, nor will it ever be. Negotiations on the core issues and the expression of our self-determination should not be confused by Israel, or others, as one and the same, because they are not. Israel, as the occupying Power, should not be allowed to continue obstructing and dictating the terms of our exercise of that inalienable right.

We are determined to achieve that right and all of the legitimate national aspirations of our people. We are determined to bring an end to the injustice endured by our people, including the grave injustice inflicted on our refugees. We are determined to peacefully achieve the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the pre-1967 borders. That achievement will be the core of a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. We are grateful for the long-standing support of the international community in that journey, and urge that no effort be spared at this critical crossroads to make that a reality. It clearly requires that the Security Council responsibly uphold its Charter duties.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): At the outset, I would like to extend my condolences to the people of Turkey following yesterday's tragic earthquake.

Let me begin by reminding the Council that the name of today's debate is the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and not vice versa. This morning, I would like to take the unusual step of actually focusing on the situation in the Middle East. Let me assure the Council that I will give proper attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict later. However, let us first look at the facts.

The Middle East is in turmoil. Thousands of innocents have been gunned down in the street. People are calling for their freedom and demanding their rights. Yet, month after month, the Council deals disproportionately with one — and only one — conflict in the region. I do not claim that the Council is not dealing with the situation of specific countries in the Middle East. It does. However, I think that it is time to start connecting the dots so that we can face the bigger picture.

For generations, the Arab world has failed miserably to address the needs of its own people. The United Nations Development Programme has sponsored five — five— *Arab Human Development Reports* since 2002. Year after year, the Arab researchers who write the reports often offer a glimpse into the real world of the Middle East. Young people struggle without access to jobs and education. Women are denied basic rights. Free expression is repressed. Minorities are persecuted. Elections are a sham.

With their world in flames, Arab leaders continue to blame Israel and the West for all their problems. For years, it has been the only explanation that they have been able to offer to their own people. From time to time, they spice up the story. When a shark attacked a tourist in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh recently, the local Egyptian Governor suggested that Mossad was using sharks to harm Egyptian tourism. Everything wrong in the Middle East, according to many Arab leaders, is simply Israel's fault. If it is not Mossad, it is the Central Intelligence Agency, MI6 or some other foreign force.

Today, the people of the Middle East demand real answers for their plight. We have seen their brave stands in public squares. We have heard their cries. We have witnessed the deadly response to such calls for freedom. In Hama, Dara and Latakia, the Syrian regime slaughters its citizens in a desperate bid to hold onto power. Some members of the Council remain blind to Al-Assad's brutality. In Libya, the reign of Muammar Al-Qadhafi is over after more than 40 years of repression and many months of bloodshed. The Libyan despot's violent end illustrated what Churchill once described as the signal disadvantage of a dictator. What

he does to others may often be done back to him. That truth haunts the minds of many leaders in our region. Al-Qadhafi's fate rings an alarm bell for them.

In Iran, an Ayatollah regime represses its own people, as it helps other tyrants to butcher theirs. Last week, United Nations Special Rapporteur Shaheed briefed the General Assembly, offering a chilling picture of what daily life in Iran looks like. His report highlighted

> "a pattern of systemic violations of ... fundamental human rights ... includ[ing] multifarious deficits in relation to the administration of justice ... practices that amount to torture ... the imposition of the death penalty in the absence of proper judicial safeguards ... the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, and the erosion of civil and political rights". (*see A/66/374, para. 18*)

Iran remains the world's central banker, chief trainer and primary sponsor of terror. Recent events have shown that its State-directed terrorist activities extend from the Persian Gulf to the Washington Beltway, with targets that range from innocent protesters to foreign soldiers to official diplomatic representatives. That is the way the regime behaves today. One can only imagine what it would do with nuclear capabilities — with the dangerous combination of extremist ideology, advanced missile technology and nuclear weapons.

The reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency make clear that Iran continues to march towards the goal of a nuclear bomb in defiance of the international community. We all cannot allow it to place the entire world under the spectre of nuclear terrorism. The world must stop Iran before it is too late.

The Middle East is trembling. Its future is uncertain. Two roads stand before us. There is a future offered by Iranian and Syrian leaders of more extremism, greater violence and continued hate. Their vision will not liberate human beings. It will enslave them. It does not build. It destroys. There is another road — a path of progress, reform and moderation.

The choice before us is clear. It has never been more critical to make the right choice for the future of the Middle East and all its inhabitants. It is time for the Council to stop ignoring the destructive forces that seek to keep the Middle East in the past, so that we can seize the promise of a brighter future.

Make no mistake. It is important for Israel and the Palestinians to resolve our long-standing conflict. It is important on its own merits, so that Israelis and Palestinians alike can lead peaceful, secure and prosperous lives. But it will not produce a sudden outbreak of stability, harmony and democratization from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea. Seriously addressing the underlying problems of the Middle East will be essential to advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The road to peace can only be built on a foundation of mutual recognition and a dialogue. A month ago, President Abbas stood in this building and said,

> "I come before the General Assembly today from the Holy Land, the land of Palestine, the land of divine messages, ascension of the Prophet Muhammad and the birthplace of Jesus Christ". (*A/66/PV.19, p. 29*)

He denied 4,000 years of Jewish history. It was not a small omission. It was not an oversight. The Palestinian leadership's attempts to erase the connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel is not new. Others in the Arab world have offered a different message. In 1995, for example, King Hussein went to the United States and said,

> "For our part, we shall continue to work for the new dawn when all the children of Abraham and their descendants are living together in the birthplace of their three great monotheistic religions".

Let me repeat that King Hussein said three monotheistic religions, not one or two. Those who seek peace do not negate the narrative of the other side. On the contrary, they recognize its existence and choose to sit down and negotiate peace in good faith. That is what President Sadat did; it is what King Hussein did. The ancient Jewish bond with the land of Israel is unbreakable. This is our homeland. The United Nations recognized Israel as a Jewish State 64 years ago. It is time for the Palestinians and more than 20 Muslim countries around the globe to do the same.

Let there be no doubt, and I repeat, Israel wants peace with a future Palestinian State. In word and in deed, my Government has demonstrated time and again

that we seek two States for two peoples living side by side in peace. I repeat: two States for two peoples. We do not hear that from the Palestinians or any Arab leaders. If anyone should hear the phrase "two States for two peoples", they should call me, on a 911 number if necessary, day or night.

It is no coincidence that Prime Minister Netanyahu stood here last month and issued a clear call to President Abbas (see A/66/PV.19). Today let me reiterate that call to the Palestinians. Sit down with Israel. Leave your preconditions behind. Start negotiations now. The international community has called on the Palestinians to go back to negotiations. Israel has accepted the principles outlined by the Quartet to restart negotiations immediately without preconditions. We are waiting for the Palestinians to do the same thing.

The Palestinians suggest that settlements are the core cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is an interesting assertion, considering the fact that the conflict raged for nearly half a century before a single settlement sprang up in the West Bank. From 1948 until 1967, the West Bank was part of Jordan. Gaza was part of Egypt. The Arab world did not lift a finger to create a Palestinian State, and it sought Israel's alienation when not a single settlement stood anywhere in the West Bank or Gaza. The issue of settlements will be worked out over the course of negotiations. But the primary obstacle to peace is not settlements. That is just a pretext for the Palestinians to avoid negotiations. The primary obstacle to peace is the Arab world's refusal to acknowledge the Jewish people's ancient connection to the land of Israel, and the Palestinians' insistence on the so-called right of return.

Today the Palestinian leadership is calling for an independent Palestinian State, but insists that its own people return to the Jewish State. That is a proposition that no one who believes in the right of Israel to exist could accept, because the only equation in political science with mathematical certainty is that the so-called right of return equals the destruction of the State of Israel. The idea that Israel will be flooded with millions of Palestinians is a non-starter. The international community and the Palestinian leadership know it, but the Palestinian people do not hear it. This gap between perception and reality is a major obstacle to peace. The so-called right of return is the major hurdle to achieving peace. Since the Palestinian leadership refuses to tell the Palestinian people the truth, the international community and the people around this table have a responsibility to tell the Palestinian people about the basic compromises that they will have to make.

The many issues that remain outstanding can and will be resolved only through direct negotiations between the parties. Israel's peace with Egypt was negotiated, not imposed. Peace with Jordan was negotiated, not imposed. An Israeli-Palestinian peace must be negotiated; it cannot be imposed. Palestinian unilateral action at the United Nations is no path to real statehood; it is a march of folly. Today the Palestinians are far from meeting the basic criteria for statehood, including the test of effective control. The President of the Palestinian Authority has zero authority in the Gaza Strip. Before flying 9,000 kilometres to New York to seek United Nations membership, President Abbas should have driven 50 kilometres to Gaza, which he has been unable to visit since 2007. In the same breath that they claim that the State will be peace-loving, Palestinian leaders speak of unity with Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization. Hamas and a love of peace? There is no greater contradiction in terms.

This month, on a fund-raising excursion of terrorism with his Iranian patrons, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh stood in front of an audience in Tehran and said that "the correct strategy to liberate our country and Jerusalem is violent resistance". Under Hamas rule, Gaza remains a launching ground for constant rocket attacks targeting Israeli civilians that are fuelled by a continuous flow of weapons from Iran and elsewhere. Israel has a right to defend itself. As the Palmer report made clear, the naval blockade is a legitimate security measure for preventing weapons from entering the Gaza sea.

When it is not attacking Israelis, Hamas is oppressing its own people. In Gaza, civil society is non-existent. Political opponents are tortured, women are subjugated and children are used as suicide bombers and human shields. Textbooks and television glorify martyrdom and demonize the Jews. Incitement against Israelis also continues in the West Bank, among the official institutions of the Palestinian Authority, which names its public squares after suicide bombers.

The unresolved questions about the future of a Palestinian State cannot be simply swept under the carpet. They go to the core of resolving our conflict.

They have to be addressed. Let me be clear: for Israel, the question is not whether we can accept a Palestinian State; we can. The question is what the character of the Palestinian State that emerges alongside us will be — whether it will live in peace.

Palestinian unilateral action in the United Nations breaches the Oslo Accords, the Interim Arrangements, the Paris Protocol and other bilateral agreements that form the basis of 40 spheres of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, all of which could be jeopardized by unilateral action at the United Nations. This unilateral initiative will raise expectations that cannot be met. It is a recipe for instability and, potentially, violence. Members of the international community should be clear about the responsibility: you vote for it, you own it. All those who vote for unilateral action and recognition will be responsible for its consequences. At this critical juncture, the Palestinians' true friends will encourage them to put aside the false idol of unilateralism and get back to the hard work of direct negotiations.

Speaking of friends, the many so-called Arab champions of the Palestinians' cause have a responsibility to play a constructive role. Constructive support from the Arab world is vital for building the civic and economic structures necessary for real Palestinian statehood and peace. Instead of simply adding to the cause of State-bashing, the Palestinians' true supporters will help advance State-building. Arab donors provided just 20 per cent of international funds for the Palestinian Authority's regular budget last year. Let me put this in perspective: last year Arab donations to the regular Authority budget accounted for a little more than half of what Saudi Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal spent on his newest personal luxury jet. People in Washington, London and Paris are struggling with an economic downturn, but still providing the bulk of support for Palestinian institutions, while Arab States, saturated in petrodollars, do not even give the Palestinians crumbs from the table.

In the Jewish tradition we are taught that whosoever saves a single life saves an entire universe. This sacred principle forms the backbone of Israel's democracy. It drives our Government's policy. We witnessed a clear reflection of those values last week. All of Israel welcomed home our kidnapped soldier, Gilad Shalit, after he had spent more than five years in Hamas captivity. It was a moment of great joy, but it came with tremendous costs. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General personally, and the people around him. Some of the countries represented here today played an important role in Gilad Shalit's release. For us, the supreme value of a single human life justified releasing more than 1,000 terrorists and criminals covered in the blood of innocents. The values inherent in such an act shine bright in our region. Many took note. On Twitter, one Syrian blogger, Soori Madsoos, wrote:

> "Their Government is prepared to pay the ultimate price for one citizen, while our Government kills us like we were animals, and our Arab neighbours say that it is an internal matter".

Time and again, Israel has shown that it is ready and able to make bold and courageous decisions to preserve life, to uphold human dignity and to pursue peace.

Sustainable peace must be negotiated, must be nurtured and must be anchored in security. It must take root in homes, schools and media in order to teach tolerance and understanding and thus grow within hearts and minds. It must be built on the foundation of a younger generation that understands the compromises necessary for peace. A brighter future for the Middle East must be forged from within, when we are open and honest about the challenges before us, and resolute in our determination to meet them together.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now invite the Permanent Representative of the United States of America and Member of President Obama's Cabinet, Her Excellency Ms. Susan Rice to take the floor.

Ms. Rice (United States of America): I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing. I will begin with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United States continues to work vigorously with the parties, the Quartet and our international partners to resume negotiations on the basis of the 23 September Quartet statement. That statement provides a clear and credible path back to the negotiating table, which is the only path to achieve the two-State solution we all seek.

The Quartet statement reaffirms President Obama's vision for peace, as laid out in his May remarks. President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu have each agreed to send negotiators to Jerusalem for preparatory meetings with the Quartet envoys on 26 October. Thus, our focus remains on laying the groundwork for these and subsequent meetings leading to the two parties' exchanging comprehensive proposals on territory and security by the end of the year, as outlined in the Quartet's timeline.

We urge all members of the Council and all Member States to unite to help to create a positive climate for resuming negotiations. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians who must live side by side. Only they can reach agreement on the painful issues that divide them: borders and security; refugees and Jerusalem. We have been very clear that we believe Palestinian efforts to seek Member State status at the United Nations will not advance the peace process, but rather will complicate, delay and perhaps derail prospects for a negotiated settlement. Therefore, we have consistently opposed such unilateral initiatives. We will continue, at the same time, to exert every effort to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

Like every American Administration for decades, the Obama Administration does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlement activity. The fate of existing settlements is one that must be dealt with by the parties along with other permanent status issues, including the status of Jerusalem. For that reason, steps by the Government of Israel to advance significant new construction in Givat Hamatos are deeply disappointing.

The illegal trafficking of weapons in Gaza continues to pose a serious threat to civilians in Gaza, in Israel and in Egypt. It must be stopped.

With regard to Hamas, we reaffirm the importance of fulfilling the Quartet's principle's commitment to non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and recognition of previous agreements. We call again on Palestinians and Israelis to take constructive actions to promote peace and to avoid actions that complicate this process or undermine trust.

The United States is very pleased that Gilad Shalit has finally been reunited with his family after five long years in captivity.

I will now turn to the crisis in Syria. For more than seven months, ordinary Syrians have taken to the streets to demand respect for their most fundamental human rights. The Al-Assad regime has met those peaceful protests with brutal and escalating violence. According to the United Nations, the death toll has surpassed 3,000. It is tragic that Al-Assad's barbaric acts have recently been met by silence from this Council.

The United States welcomes the Arab League's renewed efforts to stop the violence to allow the Syrian people to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and assembly and to bring about a peaceful transition to democracy.

We are very sceptical, however, that the Al-Assad regime has any intention of allowing the opposition to meet in an environment free of intimidation. We again call for full and unfettered access by credible, professional observers, including human rights monitors, the United Nations Human Rights Council's commission of inquiry and international observers.

In addition, we strongly deplore the violent incursions and raids into Lebanon by Syrian security forces that have resulted in death and injury.

Turning to Yemen: We welcome the Council's adoption on Friday of resolution 2014 (2011) addressing the grave situation there. Each day that passes without a peaceful and orderly transition of power is another day that the Yemeni people are forced to live in danger and instability. We again urge all parties to cease violence and exercise maximum restraint. We will continue to work intensively with the international community to support the Yemeni people's aspirations for democracy and protection of their basic human rights.

We are pleased that the Government of Lebanon has reaffirmed that it will uphold Lebanon's international commitments, including Lebanon's agreement with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. We believe it is of utmost important that Lebanon fulfil its funding obligations to the Special Tribunal within the coming weeks. We remain deeply committed to the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). The United States continues to support the Lebanese Armed Forces' ongoing efforts to assert control and maintain stability in southern Lebanon.

Finally, the United Sates congratulates the Tunisian people on the reported high turnout in Sunday's elections for a constituent assembly. This is a milestone on the Tunisian people's path from dictatorship to a democratic Government founded upon respect for the will of its citizens.

We look forward to working with the people and Government of Tunisia, including the new Constituent Assembly, over the next phase of their country's historic transition.

The President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs of India, to take the floor.

Mr. Ahamed (India): At the outset, I would like to convey our deep condolences to the Government and the people of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. I would also like to convey our solidarity with the Government and the people of Turkey in dealing with the aftermath of the devastating earthquake.

First of all, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for organizing this open debate on the Middle East, a region witnessing momentous transformation. I also would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing on developments in the region.

Clearly, the issue of Palestine has taken a decisive turn in the history of the Middle East conflict after President Mahmoud Abbas filed an application with the Secretary-General on 23 September for Palestine's full membership to the United Nations.

Speaking on 24 September 2011 — a day after President Abbas filed the application — my Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, said in the General Assembly that India has been steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with Israel, as per the relevant resolutions of this Organization, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map. The Prime Minister added that we look forward to welcoming Palestine as an equal Member of the United Nations (see A/66/PV.22).

India recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1975, and its Office in New Delhi was accorded full diplomatic recognition in 1980. India was the first non-Arab country to recognize the State of Palestine, in 1988. We have maintained diplomatic relations with Palestine for over two decades now. It is also pertinent to note that Palestine has been recognized by more than two thirds of the membership of this Organization.

Obviously, the State of Palestine fulfils all criteria mentioned in Article 4 of the Charter for membership to this Organization. We therefore support Palestine's application and hope that the process will be concluded expeditiously.

During my long political career, I have had the honour to work closely with Palestinian leaders. I met the undisputed leader of the Palestinian people, the late President Yasser Arafat, on 17 September 2004 at Ramallah, just a few months before he left his earthly abode. At that meeting, I had the opportunity to reiterate India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for their cause. He warmly recalled his close relations with Indian leaders, particularly Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, and appreciated India's unwavering support for the cause of the Palestinian people. We have continued our interactions with the Palestinian leadership under President Abbas. He paid state visits to India in 2008 and 2010.

As the world's largest democracy and arguably its most diverse country, India recognizes the democratic aspirations of all peoples, including those in the Middle East. The call of the international community for democracy and respect for fundamental rights will sound hollow if the present impasse continues and the Palestinians are denied their aspirations.

It is also our firm conviction that lasting peace and security in the region can be achieved only through peaceful dialogue, not through the use of force. In this context we take note of the Quartet statement of 23 September, and we hope that the timelines indicated in that statement will be realized.

The biggest stumbling block to direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians remains continuing settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories. We call upon Israel to stop settlement activities. That would facilitate the resumption of negotiations, in which all final status issues should be addressed.

We cannot, however, make Palestine's membership in the United Nations conditional upon a peace agreement, for that would be legally untenable, even while we support the resumption of direct talks to resolve the outstanding issues.

We welcome the recent agreement between Israel and Hamas on the exchange of prisoners. We hope it will ease tension and build confidence. We also hope it will pave the way for an early and significant easing of restrictions on movement of goods and people into the Gaza Strip, thereby addressing the dire humanitarian situation there.

India, for its part, has continued its development support to the Palestinian Authority. From the year 2009-2010, we enhanced our annual contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to $1 million, in addition to a special contribution of another $1 million to UNRWA in response to a flash appeal in 2010.

During the past two years, India has also contributed $10 million annually as untied budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority. We are offering 100 slots to the Palestinian Authority for capacity-building and human resource development under our technical and economic cooperation programme. With our IBSA partners Brazil and South Africa, we have also undertaken joint projects in Palestine, with a sports complex having just been completed.

While the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the most serious one in the region, we need to be mindful that resolution of that conflict by itself may not result in the achievement of a comprehensive and durable peace in the region. Other issues relating to Arab lands that remain under occupation are equally important. Progress on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks of the Middle East peace process is therefore necessary for a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

Developments in the Middle East since February this year underline the need to reinvigorate the search for this comprehensive peace, while the countries in the region undertake inclusive political processes and implement reforms to meet the legitimate aspirations of their people. It is important that the grievances of the people be addressed through dialogue and negotiations rather than resort to arms.

It is the responsibility of all countries to create conditions that enable their people to freely determine their pathways to development. That is the essence of democracy and fundamental human freedoms. No action should be taken from outside that exacerbates problems and gives space for the rise of extremism. The international community should stand ready to assist countries in their efforts while respecting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries. As my Prime Minister said in the General Assembly on 24 September, societies cannot be reordered from outside through military force. Observance of the rule of law is as important in international affairs as it is within countries.

Guided by these principles, India stands ready to play its role in our collective endeavours to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Berger (Germany): Germany offers its condolences to the people of Turkey on the loss of lives resulting from the massive earthquake on Sunday, and to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the passing of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing.

Let me mention also that Germany obviously aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later on behalf of the European Union.

After a long period of standstill in the Middle East peace process, there is reason to hope that the stalemate might be broken by preparatory meetings of the Quartet with the parties on 26 October. As specified by the Quartet, a first step would be to agree on an agenda and method of proceeding in the negotiations. After that, the parties will have to take the next step, to come forward with comprehensive proposals on territory and security.

As the Quartet also said in its statement, meetings in themselves will establish the trust needed for successful negotiations. And trust is key in order to return to negotiations.

In this respect, we are extremely worried about the recent Israeli steps to expand settlement activity. The decision to advance the planning process on thousands of additional housing units in the settlement of Gilo and Givat Hamatos and plans to legalize illegal outposts within Israeli law undermine the trust that is needed for negotiations. They are not compatible with

Road Map obligations and run counter to current Quartet efforts.

We have called on the Government of Israel to dispel any doubts about its interest in serious negotiations. The imperative of trust should also be taken into consideration when looking at the Palestinian application for United Nations membership. We are mindful of the responsibility entrusted to us in the Committee on the Admission of New Members.

Let me very clear on this: Germany supports the establishment of a Palestinian State. As a matter of course, such a State will become a Member of the United Nations. But it is also our responsibility in the Council to give the Quartet's current efforts and actions the chance to bear fruit. There is no viable alternative to the resumption of negotiations. The two-State solution can be achieved only through a peace agreement between the parties. We want to see the State of Israel and a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

Germany acknowledges the remarkable progress made by the Palestinian Authority in building the institutions of the future State of Palestine. In their reports, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations have clearly stated that the Palestinian Authority has crossed the threshold towards being a functioning State in key sectors. We commend the Palestinian Authority for demonstrating this capability. Now the political process must catch up with the progress made in State-building on the ground.

Germany is relieved at the release of Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit. We hope that his release and the related exchange of prisoners will give new momentum to the Middle East peace process. In that regard, we believe that now is the time to fully implement resolution 1860 (2009), which calls for the unconditional opening of crossings for goods and people to and from Gaza, thereby preventing the illicit trafficking of arms and ammunition.

Let me now turn briefly to the issue of Lebanon. It is with great sadness that we heard that Judge Antonio Cassese, the first President of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, passed away last Friday. The loss of that eminent scholar will undoubtedly affect all those who seek accountability and justice. In that context, we would like to recall the statement made by His Excellency Najib Mikati, Prime Minister of Lebanon, before the Council, when he reiterated Lebanon's commitment to all its international obligations, including those relating to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

In early 2011, Tunisians courageously stood up against an autocratic regime that had repressed them for decades. Nine months later, free elections are taking place in Tunisia, for the first time since it gained independence. Ninety per cent of those who registered for elections have cast their ballot. That is an impressive number. Peaceful, free and fair elections provide an important role model for countries where the Arab Spring has already made inroads and offer tremendous encouragement where people take to the streets seeking to live a better life in freedom and dignity. Germany will continue to actively support Tunisia through its transformation partnership.

Let me turn now to the question of Syria. On 4 October, two permanent members of the Council vetoed a draft resolution on the situation in Syria that condemned human rights violations, demanded an end to the violence and called for an inclusive, Syrian-led political process. The days that have passed since that vote have shown that the strategy advocated by some to give the Syrian regime more time has failed. Those who delayed Council action with reference to their bilateral efforts have not delivered. On the contrary: the situation has further deteriorated. In a statement made on 14 October, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, voiced her disappointment at the inaction of the Council. She reminded the members of the international community to take protective action in a collective and decisive manner before the continual ruthless repression and killings drove the country into a full-blown civil war.

Indifferent spectatorship is not an option. We still think that the Council should send a strong message in the form of a resolution. However, we are not going to accept any equidistant approach that suggests that the opposition could be as responsible for the violence as is the Government. Only the Syrian people can decide on the future of their country, and we therefore welcome the various efforts undertaken by the Syrian opposition to peacefully build a political platform. In that respect, we note the creation of the Syrian National Council as a positive step forward.

We also welcome the efforts undertaken by the League of Arab States to convince Damascus to enter into a meaningful dialogue with the opposition. The Arab League has set a clear timeline for such a dialogue. But it is clear that dialogue has to include all of the opposition and that there can be no meaningful dialogue as long as repression and killings of demonstrators continue.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China is deeply saddened at the major loss of life and property suffered by Turkey during the earthquake that struck its eastern region. My Prime Minister, Mr. Wen Jiabao, has already conveyed our condolences to the Prime Minister of Turkey, and China is ready to extend a helping hand.

I should like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. I also listened very carefully to the statement made by the representatives of Palestine and Israel.

The Middle East peace process is currently at an impasse, which is a source of great concern to China. We hope that all of the parties concerned will demonstrate political will, and, on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map, settle disputes between Palestine and Israel by political and diplomatic means, so that the two countries can coexist in peace.

The issue of Israel's settlements is the direct cause of the current impasse in the peace talks and a major obstacle to their resumption. China deeply regrets the recent decision of Israel in connection with new settlements in East Jerusalem, to which we are opposed. We urge Israel to put an end to that project, to cooperate actively with international peace efforts so as to create conditions for building confidence between the two sides and break the present impasse.

China welcomes the recent agreement between the two sides on the exchange of prisoners, and we appreciate the mediation efforts made by countries such as Egypt and Germany in that respect. China hopes that both sides will seize this opportunity to continue to take constructive steps to ease tensions and minimize differences in order to restart the peace talks.

Efforts to solve the Middle East problem require the strong support and help of the international community. China welcomes and supports all efforts aimed at minimizing differences and promoting the relaunching of dialogue and negotiations.

On 26 October, the Quartet will hold talks with Palestine and Israel separately on the resumption of direct talks. We hope that all parties concerned will work together for the early resumption of talks and the achievement of substantive results in that context. China is in favour of the Council's playing a greater role in connection with the question of the Middle East.

China was among the first to recognize the State of Palestine. We have always been supportive of Palestine's just cause to establish an independent State. We support the vision of two States realized through political negotiations and the establishment of a fully sovereign, independent State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. China supports Palestine's membership in the United Nations.

To achieve a comprehensive, lasting and just peace in the Middle East, there must be progress on all tracks of the peace process, including the talks between Lebanon and Israel and between Israel and Syria. All parties concerned should create conditions for diplomatic negotiations with a view to ending the confrontations and tensions that have plagued this region for too long.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): Let me join previous speakers in expressing our sympathy and solidarity to the Turkish people and Government for the tragic loss of lives caused by the earthquake that struck eastern Turkey, and to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing of Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing. I also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements.

It is not often that we can, at these regular briefings, welcome positive developments on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. So let me begin by welcoming the exchange of prisoners and the orderly manner in which the agreement that made it possible was implemented. We hope this positive development can be translated into further cooperation, in particular concerning the situation in Gaza. Fully lifting the blockade without prejudice to legitimate Israeli

security concerns is vital to allow for life to go back to normal and reconstruction to take place.

Brazil believes that the time has come for Palestine to be fully represented at the United Nations. We hope the Council can take a decision on the Palestinian application very soon. The ultimate demonstration that Palestine is a peace-loving State is precisely the decision to turn to international law and to the United Nations to realize its legitimate right to self-determination. The recognition of the Palestinian people's legitimate right to sovereignty and self-determination increases the possibilities of peace between Israel and Palestine.

While supporting the Palestinian aspiration, Brazil remains convinced that a negotiating process, in which Israel's legitimate concerns for security are duly taken into account, is the way to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East.

Negotiations, however, must be meaningful and minimally balanced. International recognition of the Palestinian State and its admission in the United Nations as a full Member can help reduce the asymmetry that at present characterizes relations between the parties. No sustainable agreement can be reached if one side is too weak and is constantly undermined by the actions of the other on the ground.

In this regard, the announcements of new settlements in occupied East Jerusalem are not only against international law, but are also detrimental to the prospects for resuming negotiations. Coming just days after the Quartet called for the resumption of negotiations on the basis of Security Council resolutions and the obligations under the Road Map, they downgrade our hopes and contradict Israel's proclaimed disposition to negotiate a viable peace.

The continuation of settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian Territories destroys the very feasibility of a two-State solution. It is not reasonable to expect the Palestinians to keep negotiating as the reality on the ground is being deeply and, some fear, irreversibly altered. This is particularly worrisome in East Jerusalem and in small and medium settlements deep into the West Bank. In the current circumstances, therefore, strong political commitment is needed for the peace process to advance. This includes putting a halt to and reversing settlement activity.

The Quartet must impress upon the parties the need to abide by the steps and timeframe set out in the statement of 23 September. Given the link many countries see between the deliberations in the Council on Palestine's request for membership and the Quartet's efforts for the resumption of peace negotiations, it is important that the Council be briefed by the Quartet on progress made, or the lack thereof.

As Brazil's Foreign Minister Antonio Patriota stated in our debate on preventive diplomacy in September, "It behoves the Security Council to find solutions that can both resolve the challenges posed by specific situations of crisis and, at the same time, strengthen the multilateral system itself" (see S/PV.6621, p. 19).

The wave of change that has swept the Middle East and Northern Africa lends an even greater sense of urgency to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for a State of their own. In this pressing issue — perhaps one of the most important issues regarding international peace and security today — this Council must also be on the right side of history.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset we wish to express our condolences to Turkey with respect to the destructive earthquake that hit the country, which has claimed human lives.

We are grateful to Mr. Pascoe for his briefing on developments in the Middle East. We share his concerns with respect to the stalemate in the process of a Middle East settlement.

As of today, resumption of direct Israeli-Palestinian talks continues to be one of the most pressing tasks. It is distressing that the parties have yet to progress towards establishing an atmosphere of mutual trust, which is an important condition for a serious and productive dialogue.

At the same time, one must be encouraged by the fact that despite certain pessimistic forecasts, this past September did not lead to any major upheavals. What is more, the Quartet of Middle East mediators has stepped up its work, within which intensive efforts are under way to narrow the differences of the parties. We would like to highlight the Quartet's statement adopted on 23 September in New York, reaffirming the importance and inviolability of the entire international legal basis for the Middle East settlement, including

the well-known Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles — including the key principle of land for peace — and the Road Map and previous agreements between the parties.

Nevertheless, the authorities in Israel, in violation of the norms and principles of international law and ignoring the view of members of the Quartet, continue to authorize the construction of more and more housing units in the occupied territories. We are particularly concerned that such decisions are adopted at a crucial time for the future of the peace process. We believe that settlement activities are a primary impediment to a two-State solution. They undermine the painstaking efforts of the international community to relaunch the dialogue and dash existing hopes.

Now more than ever, the parties need to take steps towards each other, and not unilateral steps that change the situation on the ground and prejudice the final parameters for a settlement. Israel must reassess its plans for construction in East Jerusalem and cease its demolition of Palestinian structures.

Despite the troublesome situation in the Palestinian-Israeli area, Russia, as a member of the Quartet, together with its partners, is prepared to use any opportunity to advance towards peace in the region. We anticipate that the Quartet's planned contacts on 26 October with representatives of the parties will help get the peace process moving again.

With respect to the official application of Palestine to the United Nations for membership, we believe that this bid is logical and legitimate. We recognized the Palestinian State as early as 1988 and are prepared to support the request of the Palestinians again. We believe their State meets all criteria in the United Nations Charter with respect to future Members of the world Organization.

Our view is that Palestine's application for membership in no way contradicts the negotiated peace process or diminish its prospects. Quite the contrary; it is complementary. It is important that the leadership of the Palestine National Authority has unequivocally and repeatedly emphasized its readiness to continue the quest for ways to resume negotiations.

Our sense is that despite the dire calls since September in the relations between the parties there has been some positive points. This is seen in the exchange of the Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, for more than one thousand Palestinian prisoners. That is an important humanitarian gesture of goodwill that contributes to an overall improvement of the situation in the region and of the atmosphere in terms of the Palestinian-Israeli relationship. The Russian Federation has supported the mediation efforts in this area, including during our contacts with the leadership of Hamas.

This arrangement gives us every reason to anticipate that the parties will be able to move towards addressing other sensitive issues as well, above all in terms of improving the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. We share the view of those who call for lifting all restrictions on the movement of goods in and out of Gaza, particularly with respect to building materials.

The inter-Palestinian reconciliation continues to be an imperative. The leaders of all Palestinian forces, especially Fatah and Hamas, need to step up their efforts to consolidate the Palestinian ranks. We would also like to call for progress on other tracks of a Middle East settlement, including the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Without advancing on them, a lasting, comprehensive and just settlement in the Middle East is not possible.

With respect to the situation in Syria, which some colleagues have touched upon, the Security Council has been able and will continue to be able to put in its constructive word, as was just done with respect to Yemen. The Russian-Chinese draft resolution on the situation in Syria, which is aimed at a settlement and not at inciting conflict, continues to be available to Council members. It is clear that the strategy of certain members of the international community with respect to Syria, consistiing of threats and pressure that worsen the situation in the country through sanctions, does not work. We are encouraged by recent initiatives and steps proposed by the League of Arab States with regard to the Syrian Arab Republic.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): At the outset, I wish to offer my Government's condolences for yesterday's earthquake in the Turkish city of Van. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families. My Government stands ready to support the Government of Turkey in any way that it can.

I wish also to express my Government's sincere condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its

people following the passing of His Royal Highness Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

This is a moment of huge opportunity for the people of the Middle East to build more open, free and prosperous societies. Yesterday, Tunisians cast their votes in the first ever democratic elections to appoint an Assembly to draft the country's new constitution. At the same time, the new Libyan authorities declared liberation from 42 years of ruthless dictatorship. For Tunisia, Libya and, indeed, Egypt, the road ahead will be difficult, but the change under way in those countries, as well as more broadly in the region, has shown that demands for political and economic freedom will spread more widely and by themselves, not because Western nations advocate them, but because they are the natural aspirations of people everywhere. We shall continue to work in partnership with those forging a new future for their countries.

The courage and determination of the Tunisian, Libya and Egyptian peoples and the changes taking place in their nations serve both as an inspiration to the rest of region and a warning to the dictatorships that continue to brutally crush the legitimate aspirations of their peoples. The lesson of the last nine months has been that regimes that use violence to oppress their peoples instead of responding to their legitimate demands will not survive. We are therefore deeply disappointed that, owing to the use of the veto by two members, the Security Council was incapable earlier this month of appropriately censuring the Syrian regime, which continues to kill, brutalize and torture its people at the same rate that it has been doing for the past seven months.

There is no sign of the reforms that Assad has been promising, nor any remorse for the tactics that have been used by the regime, which may amount to crimes against humanity. It is a worrying state of affairs when Iran's leadership, a regime that has itself crushed the rights of the people, is able to voice a greater sense of condemnation than this Council. It is time that members of the Security Council assume their responsibilities and take the strong collective action that is required if there is to be any hope of deterring the Syrian regime from its violent course.

In contrast, we are pleased at the unanimous adoption on 21 October of resolution 2014 (2011) on Yemen. President Saleh must now heed the calls of the Council and the wider international community. He must cease the bloodshed and the human rights violations and immediately sign the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative that will set into motion a transition of power.

The changes taking place across the Middle East are bringing into sharp focus the unfulfilled aspirations of the Palestinian people. They must realize their goal of an independent, viable State of Palestine, just as others in the region are demanding, and in some cases securing, their legitimate rights. At this critical and sensitive juncture for the region and the Middle East peace process, progress in securing a democratic peaceful State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security is urgent and essential.

Speaking on behalf of the United Kingdom, as a friend of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, I wish to make three points. First, the Quartet statement of 23 September set out a time frame for negotiations to be concluded over the coming 12 months on the basis of the well-known parameters — two States, based on the 1967 borders, with mutually agreed land swaps; security arrangements that protect Palestinian sovereignty whilst also providing sufficient reassurance to Israel; Jerusalem as the capital of both States; and a just, fair and agreed solution for refugees. It is time now for both parties to fully commit to direct negotiations within this framework and to make the bold compromises required to realize the goal we all want to see. We fully support the efforts of the Quartet envoys to restart talks, including through the important meetings with the parties in Jerusalem on 26 October.

Secondly, settlement activity must stop. We condemn the recent Israeli decisions to expand construction in the settlements of Mordot Gilo and Givat Hamatos. If implemented, those constructions would further erode the viability of a future Palestinian State. The proposed constructions in Givat Hamatos would cut the geographic contiguity between East Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Settlement construction, including in East Jerusalem, is an obstacle to peace and erodes the space for meaningful negotiations on final status issues, including the status of Jerusalem. It undermines trust and is illegal under international law. It should stop. The Israeli Government should abandon its construction plans, and the time has come for the Israeli Government to stop merely talking about its readiness to resume negotiations and instead take the

action necessary to inspire the confidence that will bring about meaningful negotiations.

Thirdly, we welcome the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. His long captivity and the lack of access by the Red Cross were unjustifiable. There must now be a sustainable and complete end to violence emanating from Gaza. There must also be an easing of restrictions on the flow of goods and personnel in and out of Gaza. The status quo only breeds resentment, radicalism and violence. An improved Gazan economy is both essential to the people of Gaza and in Israel's long-term security interests.

There is no time to waste in making progress towards peace. Without it, history demonstrates that the most likely outcome is backsliding towards violence. The leaders of both sides must demonstrate the leadership required to ensure the outcome that both their peoples want.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I would also like to express my condolences to the Republic of Turkey for the earthquake that has just struck it. We also offer condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the death of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

I thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe for his statement and I would like to make the following points. First of all, three months ago, France articulated here the desire that the legitimate aspirations expressed by the peoples of the region for freedom and democracy should be translated into reality swiftly and peacefully. Today, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya are facing the many challenges involved in building a democracy in civil harmony and with respect for pluralism, and France will continue to provide them with all of its support. We are pleased that Tunisians turned out to the polls in great numbers yesterday to vote on the political future of their country.

A new chapter is also opening for Libya. We call on the National Transitional Council to continue to work towards a democratic and pluralistic Libya in the context of respect for the rule of law, the fight against impunity and respect for fundamental freedoms.

We hope that a peaceful political transition will soon take place in Yemen. The Council fulfilled its responsibilities on Friday in calling on President Saleh to carry out a peaceful transfer of power on the basis of the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council (see resolution 2014 (2011)).

In Syria, leaders who have lost all legitimacy are hanging on to power and dragging their country into a bloody spiral of violence. The Syrian people are already mourning more than 3,000 victims. Tens of thousands of peaceful demonstrators have been torn from their families, held in secret and tortured. Those responsible for this violence will be held accountable to justice for their actions. Repression must end so that Syrian can engage in the peaceful transition sought by the Syrian people. That is the only way to restore stability to Syria and preserve stability in the region, which is threatened by Syrian incursions in Lebanon, the flow of refugees into neighbouring countries and attempts by the Syrian regime to exploit Palestinian claims.

The members of the Council that have opposed or voted against a draft resolution of the Council will have to explain to history and to Syrian, international and domestic public opinion what they are offering specifically to bring an end to the bloodshed. This is no longer the time for words, to which the regime is not listening in any case. We must take action. Opting for Security Council paralysis is tantamount to supporting the Al-Assad regime and taking his side. The Syrian people understand that.

In this volatile context, parties must show the greatest restraint with respect to Lebanon and continue to cooperate within the framework of the Tripartite Commission to prevent any new mishap along the Blue Line. We reiterate our appeal to the Lebanese Government to honour all its international obligations, in particular those concerning the Special Tribunal and resolution 1701 (2006).

The demands of the Palestinian people are every bit as legitimate as those expressed throughout the region. It is legitimate and natural for the Palestinian people to ask for a Palestinian State to be established, while the two-State solution and the Palestinian people's right to self-determination enjoy the consensus of the international community. It is in that context that President Abbas submitted a request for admission as a full Member of the United Nations on 23 September. I will not dwell on our consideration of that request, which is under way in the Committee on the Admission of New Members and will soon be reported on to the Security Council.

Everyone knows, however, that the path to admission to the United Nations is strewn with obstacles. That is why, on 21 September, the President of the French Republic proposed an intermediate stage that could generate concrete progress for the Palestinians by elevating the status of Palestine in the United Nations to that of Observer State. That is the best way currently available to emerge from the impasse.

A concrete response to Palestinian demands will require the establishment of political conditions that would enable the emergence of the Palestinian State. That is what we must work on as a priority. To that end, the President of the French Republic called for a change of methodology, on the basis of his conviction that circumventing multilateral forums like the Security Council or eschewing the support of regional and European partners, inter alia, is not working. We must also stress the need for a credible framework, such as the parameters defined by the Europeans here in February or those announced by President Obama in May. Such a credible framework must be based on a clear timeline for negotiations in order to allow the parties to resume their talks on a sound basis and remove all preconditions.

On 23 September, the Quartet set such a timeline for negotiations. We welcome the parties' positive response to it. In two days, Palestinian and Israeli representatives will meet with members of the Quartet in Jerusalem in a new attempt to relaunch direct negotiations, which will begin with an initial phase on borders and security and conclude with an agreement on all of final status issues within a year. The chances of success are slim because trust between the parties has been deeply shaken. That is why the international community must pool its efforts and unanimously call on both parties to refrain from all provocation. France proposes the convening of a donor conference in Paris to help relaunch the process and strengthen Palestinian institutions.

In that context, we condemn once again the recent announcement of the expansion of Israeli settlements, which undermine peace efforts and hinder the achievement of the two-State solution. Following the decision to build in Gilo, taken following the Quartet declaration, a new project has been announced for construction in Givat Hamatos. The project threatens the contiguity of Palestinian territories between East Jerusalem and the West Bank and directly threatens the possible establishment of a two-State solution, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. The announcement comes across not only as a provocation aimed at undermining trust, but also as a deliberate effort to make the creation of a Palestinian State impossible. How often must we reiterate that the construction of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is a blatant violation of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions. Israel must cease all settlement activity and abandon the projects it has announced. Similarly, we can only condemn a recent decision to legalize the outposts.

The settlements have become a central symbol of the conflict and the concrete denial of any discourse on the quest for a peaceful solution. However, we welcome the agreement that freed Gilad Shalit and Palestinian prisoners. We hope that the agreement will allow the Palestinian reconciliation process to move forward under the authority of President Abbas and in the context of commitments made by the Palestine Liberation Organization and recalled on 21 September before the General Assembly (see A/66/PV.11).

Gaza cannot be excised from the effort to establish a concrete basis for a Palestinian State. In that regard, the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) — including the lifting of the blockade imposed on the people of Gaza and an end to the unacceptable shelling of Israeli territory — remains necessary.

In conclusion, the peoples of the region are demanding the right to express themselves and to participate in shaping their own destinies. The Council heard the appeals from the people of Libya and Yemen and responded clearly. The situation in Syria can be treated no differently, and the Council must break its own silence, awake from its torpor and complacency, and exert the necessary pressure on the Syrian regime.

I would echo the words of the President of the French Republic to the General Assembly that the "spring of the Arab peoples imposes on us the moral and political obligation at last to find a solution to the Middle East conflict" (*A/66/PV.11, pp. 22-23*). The Council, mandated by the Charter to maintain international peace and security, cannot be exempt from that obligation.

Mr. Messone (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Madame, for having convened this important meeting under your presidency. Gabon wishes to echo the messages of condolence to the Government of

Turkey in the aftermath of the earthquake that struck the eastern part of the country, and to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the demise of its Crown Prince. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

With respect to the Palestinian issue, my delegation wishes again to stress, as it has always done in previous statements on this matter, that, alongside many other countries, it shares the fundamental goal of the existence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living in peace and security within recognized borders. Reaching that goal and achieving lasting peace entails working within the framework established by the international community, within which the Quartet is endeavouring to bring together the two parties. From our perspective, it is against that backdrop that Palestine's application to become a Member State should be considered

My delegation would like to reiterate its appreciation for the efforts of the international community, especially the Quartet's latest proposal aimed at relauching the peace process between Israel and Palestine, and in particular the next scheduled meeting between the Quartet and the parties. Although it is true that the Quartet's proposals aim largely at a timetable for continuing talks in the process, this new initiative nevertheless has the merit of laying the foundations for the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine, which have been at an impasse since the fall of 2010.

My delegation hopes that the next meeting between the Quartet and the parties sets a course towards the resumption of negotiations on final status issues, namely, borders, Jewish settlements, the fate of Palestinian refugees and the status of Jerusalem. We therefore call on the parties to refrain from any actions that undermine trust among them and have a negative impact on the restart of the negotiations.

Establishing trust also entails respect for international law and the resolutions of the Security Council. The announcement of new settlements and the blockade of Gaza are not conducive to an atmosphere for the resumption of negotiations. We condemn the most recent announcements in that regard.

I cannot fail to commend the prisoner-exchange agreement that was recently concluded between Israel and the Palestinians, which led, on 18 October, to the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit as well as Palestinian prisoners. We commend the role played by Egyptian and German diplomacy in reaching that agreement.

With regard to other situations in the region, I should like first to turn to Libya. In that connection, the developments of recent days should lead us to work together with the National Transitional Council to achieve peace, rebuild the country and re-establish security.

We also commend the way in which Tunisians have set in motion the process for establishing the basis for democracy and development in that country.

With regard to Lebanon, my delegation welcomes the calm in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. We emphasize the need for strict respect for resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). We also underscore the need for the cessation of violations of Lebanese airspace, which we believe to be unacceptable.

Lastly, with regard to Yemen, we join the appeal launched by the Secretary-General for a genuine dialogue in order to bring an end to the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situations in that country. The efforts made to that end by the Gulf Cooperation Council should be supported.

Mr. Gumbi (South Africa): My delegation expresses its appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing to the Security Council.

We associate ourselves with the statement to be delivered later today by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We also wish to thank the Ambassadors of Palestine and Israel for their statements.

The Arab Spring has prompted the Council to consider decisive actions in a number of cases. Yet, in the matter of the longest-standing item on our agenda pertaining to the Middle East, we remain paralyzed by inaction. We meet every month to discuss the situation in the Middle East. For the past several years, statements made around the table have followed similar lines. Yet, there is no real movement towards a final settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian question.

Since our latest debate (see S/PV.6623) there have been significant developments related to the Palestinian-Israeli question, including the Palestinian application for full membership of the United Nations,

the Quartet proposal for resuscitating direct negotiations, and the exchange of prisoners. However, the significance of those developments continues to be diminished by Israel's continued building of illegal settlements.

On 23 September, President Abbas submitted an application for Palestine's full membership of the United Nations. The near universal excitement and support that accompanied that historic event is an indication of how important the issue of Palestinian statehood is, not just for the Palestinians but, in fact, for the rest of the world. In that connection, South Africa wishes to reaffirm its conviction that Palestine is a peace-loving State and that it is willing and able to carry out its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations.

Furthermore, South Africa believes that the issue of Palestine's membership of the United Nations should be resolved expeditiously and in accordance with the provisions of the Charter, the relevant rules of procedure of the General Assembly and the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council. Above all, South Africa believes that we cannot make Palestine's membership of the United Nations conditional upon a peace agreement.

Mindful of the political sensitivities inherent in that process, we believe that it is now more important than ever that we act in a manner that befits the stature of the Council and recommend Palestine's full membership of the United Nations. In addition, the Council should further fulfil its obligations under the Charter and simultaneously resuscitate the negotiations process, with the aim of achieving a two-State solution.

While the Quartet proposal for negotiations is welcome, and, in fact, long overdue, we should recall that we have had concrete time frames for those negotiations before. However, every time, the parties have fallen short of an agreement within a given time frame. We hope that the parties will this time commit themselves to finding a solution even earlier than the envisaged end of 2012. We also call on those countries that have influence on the parties to encourage them to participate in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions or changing the parameters of a final outcome.

The single obstacle to the negotiations is clearly the incessant building of illegal settlements by Israel. Just last month, after the promulgation of the Quartet blueprint, the Government of Israel defied unanimous calls from the Council and the Quartet, and announced its intention to construct 1,100 new units in the settlement of Gilo. Certainly, that regressive act alters facts on the ground and the parameters of final status issues. That, not the Palestinian application for membership of the United Nations, is an obstacle to peace.

South Africa welcomes the recent agreement on prisoner swaps. The agreement, which the Secretary-General described as a significant humanitarian breakthrough, is a positive step towards cooperation between Israel and Palestine. We hope that those who have been released will be allowed to live normal lives without persecution, and that the Israeli Government will fulfil its obligation to facilitate the release of all the remaining prisoners as soon as possible. The Government of Israel must also fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law with regard to the remaining Palestinian political prisoners — by ensuring their safety, allowing access to them by family members and respecting the basic human rights of the prisoners.

We reiterate our active concern about the abuse of the human rights of Palestinian children and about their detention. Needless to say, we are all very much aware of the long-lasting adverse psychological effects that such abuses will have on this vulnerable group. In that regard, a 12 June statement by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East cited in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 states that

> "The impact of home demolitions on children can be particularly devastating. Many children affected by demolitions show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety." (*see A/66/358, para. 31 (c)*)

A few days ago, in a statement to the Third Committee of the General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur expressed concern about reports of violence against Palestinian children, including their arrest and detention by Israeli military authorities. We regret that there has been an increase in detentions of minors in recent years. Again, we call on Israel to fulfil its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law and to protect the rights of children.

South Africa looks forward to welcoming Palestine, sooner rather than later, as the 194th Member of the United Nations. We also hope that the process will achieve its stated objectives as soon as possible and ultimately bring about lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. My delegation looks forward to meaningful progress that will bring us closer to a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East region. In that connection, South Africa will continue to contribute in any way that can lead to the resolution of the Middle East problem in all of its aspects.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to add the voice of my delegation in pledging solidarity with the people of Turkey in the aftermath of the natural calamity that befell their country yesterday. Likewise, we convey our sympathy to the people of Saudi Arabia during this period of grief over the passing of their Crown Prince.

Mr. Barbalić (Bosnia and Herzegovina): At the outset, allow me to join others in expressing our deepest condolences to the Government and people of Turkey in the aftermath of the earthquake in the city of Van yesterday, as well as to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the death of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

Allow me also to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his comprehensive briefing. We further thank the Permanent Representative of Israel, His Excellency Mr. Ron Prosor, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine, His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, for their contributions to today's debate.

Bosnia and Herzegovina understands the request for membership in the United Nations that was submitted to the Secretary-General on 23 September as an aspiration of the Palestinian people for their own statehood. It is also our understanding that the entire international community would like to see the realization of a two-State solution, with a secure State of Israel and an independent State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security. The only way to bring about a just and lasting solution to the conflict is through direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Road Map, the agreements previously reached by the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Bosnia and Herzegovina attaches particular importance to the determination of the Quartet to actively seek a comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict. In that context, we take note of the Quartet's statement issued on 23 September and the proposed timetable for the resumption of credible negotiations. We are all aware of the complex situation in which the negotiations must resume, but as we have previously stated, it is in the best interest of not only the Israelis and the Palestinians, but also the peoples of the region and beyond.

The continuation of settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, continues to pose a serious obstacle on the road to comprehensive peace. Those activities are illegal under international law and are contrary to Israel's obligations under the Road Map. We therefore call upon Israel to respond positively to the appeals of the international community and to end all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We also reiterate our view that the status of Jerusalem is a final status issue that must be resolved through negotiations between the parties.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip continues to be of great concern. We reiterate our appeal for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009). Israel's security concerns, including a complete stop to violence, must also be addressed.

My delegation is aware of the tremendous efforts required from both sides in order to return to the table and get the negotiation process moving. A number of obstacles must be overcome, but we believe that good political will and a strong sense of political responsibility can help to overcome those hurdles. Even small steps in the right direction can contribute to confidence-building and the creation of the general environment necessary for successful negotiations. In that context, we welcome the recent announcement and conduct of the prisoner exchange. We appreciate the efforts of all those who have contributed to the agreement, including the Egyptian and German negotiators. In that connection, we express our sincere belief that a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement in the Middle East is possible. We therefore urge both

parties to make an extra effort and to seize the opportunity to overcome obstacles.

Allow me to conclude by turning briefly to the situations in Yemen and Syria. In Yemen, regrettably, the deadlock has been costly, the death toll has been rising, the economy is ruined, violence is flaring and some provinces have fallen out of Government control. Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly condemns all human rights violations and emphasizes that all who commit them must be held responsible. We express our hope that the transfer of power will begin as soon as possible, and we reiterate our support for an inclusive Yemeni-led process of transition.

The situation in Syria remains a source of deep concern and carries with it a real risk of greater violence and civil war. Once again, we strongly condemn the continued violence and use of force and urge the Syrian authorities to immediately stop such actions. We also reiterate our firm position that all those responsible for committing crimes must be brought to justice and held accountable. Bosnia and Herzegovina restates its support for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We still believe that an inclusive, Syrian-led dialogue and the implementation of the announced reforms are the keys to resolving the crisis.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

Allow me to join my colleagues in extending my condolences to the Government and people of Turkey on the victims of yesterday's earthquake, and to the Government and people of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

It is clear that there can be no final and durable solution to the Palestine question without real and genuine negotiations on final status issues, such as Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, water and security. That was repeatedly emphasized by President Mahmoud Abbas before and after submitting the request of the State of Palestine for membership in the Organization. That request should continue to be dealt with by the Council solely on the basis of its objective merits, in accordance with the 1948 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the admission of new Members.

The examination of the request by the Security Council should therefore in no way be linked to the Quartet activity, or subordinated to the course of the negotiation process and its vicissitudes. More fundamental, the question of the recognition of Palestinian statehood cannot and should not be subjected to the outcome of negotiations among Palestinian stakeholders. Otherwise, Palestinian statehood would be made dependent on the approval of Israel. In other words, the occupying Power would be granted a right of veto over the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, a right that the General Assembly has recognized as inalienable since 1974.

Despite all its shortcomings, let me now welcome the Quartet's statement of 23 September. Since the Quartet reiterated the obligations of both parties under the Road Map, it might be warranted to recall that, with regard to security, the Road Map provides that the

> "Government of Israel takes no actions undermining trust, including deportations, attack on civilians, confiscation and/or demolition of Palestinian homes and property, as a punitive measure or to facilitate Israeli construction".

As for settlements, the Road Map provides that "the Government of Israel immediately dismantles settlement outposts erected since March 2001," and provides that "consistent with the Mitchell Report, the Government of Israel freezes all settlement activity (including natural growth of settlements)". Furthermore, the Quartet statement of 23 September calls upon the parties to refrain from provocative actions if negotiations are to be effective.

On 29 September, less than a week after the Quartet statement was issued, Israeli authorities approved a plan to build 1,100 housing units in the settlement of Gilo, on land originally expropriated mainly from the Palestinian village of Beit Jala. Is this not clearly inconsistent with their Road Map obligations? Is this not clearly provocative?

On 14 October, Israeli authorities approved a plan for the construction of 2,610 units in the settlement of Givat Hamatos, on land illegally annexed from Beit Safafa and Bethlehem, further inserting East Jerusalem and cutting it off from the rest of the West Bank. Is that not clearly inconsistent with the Road Map obligations? Is this not clearly provocative?

Since 23 September, Israel has unceasingly continued to blockade Gaza, severely restricting the access of goods and limiting the movement of people, in addition to launching air strikes against its suffering people. Is this not clearly inconsistent with the Road Map obligations? Is this not clearly provocative?

Since 23 September, Israel has demolished Palestinian residences and farms in the regions of Qalqiliya, Kafr ad-Dik and Tubas. The Israelis have also uprooted and burned hundreds of olive and almond trees in Ramallah, Bethlehem and Hebron. In addition, armed settlers have physically assaulted and injured Palestinian civilians, including many children, as documented by reports of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Again, is this not clearly inconsistent with the Road Map obligations? Is this not clearly provocative? Should we also add that the erection of the wall continues unabated, despite the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and the Road Map obligations?

It would not be enough for the Council to recommend to the General Assembly the admission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations; the Council also has the duty to ensure an end to Palestine's occupation. Likewise, it would not be enough for the Council to agree that Israel is the party undermining the possibility of a resumption of effective negotiations, as called for by the Quartet; the Council also has the duty to hold Israel and its leaders accountable for not abiding by their international obligations, for disregarding Security Council resolutions and for systematically violating international law and international humanitarian law.

Mr. Moraes Cabral (Portugal): Allow me to present our sincere condolences and solidarity to the people of Turkey after the terrible earthquake that struck their country, and to Saudi Arabia on the passing of the Crown Prince.

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his very useful briefing, as well as the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their contributions to today's debate.

Momentous events are still taking place in the wider Arab world, with a direct impact on the Middle East and on the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. While the Yemeni and Syrian peoples continue their courageous struggle against despotic regimes, Tunisia held its first free elections in decades and the Libyan authorities announced the liberation of their country. Gilad Shalit has been freed and reunited with his family after many years in unjustifiable detention and isolation. Palestinian prisoners have also been released. President Abbas has submitted a request for Palestine to be admitted as a full Member of the United Nations. The Quartet has put forward a statement that clearly and constructively lays the ground for the resumption of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, and the parties will be meeting with its representatives in a couple of days in Jerusalem. The Quartet has also called upon the parties to refrain from provocative actions in order for those negotiations to be effective.

Let me address some of those issues, beginning with Gilad Shalit. Portugal sincerely hopes that his release and the related liberation of Palestinian prisoners will not only lead to positive developments in the security, humanitarian and economic situations in Gaza and the cessation of all attacks on Israeli civilians from the Strip, but that it will also contribute to easing tensions between neighbours and translate into concrete progress in the stalled Middle East peace process. Shalit's liberation took leadership, determination and a sense of compromise; these are the same values that will be necessary for Israelis and Palestinians during the important weeks ahead in order to ensure the successful resumption of credible negotiations between them.

Let us be clear. Only such negotiations on all core issues between Israelis and Palestinians, pursued in good faith, will allow for a peaceful and comprehensive resolution of their conflict, based on the two-State solution, mutual security and respect for each country's needs. That comprehensive solution has been made even more urgent by the historical events taking place across the Arab world. Those events continue to underscore that the status quo is unsustainable and that there is no time to squander if we wish to ensure that the changes in the region will indeed bring about peace and prosperity for all.

As will be said later on by the observer of the European Union in his statement, which we naturally endorse, it is necessary to heed and support the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the region, including those of the Palestinians for statehood. That is, for Portugal, a matter of coherence and consistency.

Statehood is an inalienable and legitimate right of the Palestinian people. There is a strong international consensus that the Palestinian Authority is capable of running a State. Portugal commends the Palestinian leadership and people on this achievement, but recognizes that the Palestinian people will be able to fully explore their potential only in the framework of an independent and sovereign State. That can be achieved only with direct and meaningful negotiations with their Israeli neighbours.

Portugal will continue to examine the Palestinian application for full membership in the United Nations in a responsible way, as is our duty as a member of the Security Council. At the same time, we continue to strongly urge both parties to give diplomacy a chance and to work diligently towards a final and comprehensive settlement of their conflict under the terms and timelines outlined in the Quartet declaration of 24 September and on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Road Map, the agreements previously reached between the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We also recall the Quartet's appeal to the parties to refrain from any provocative actions and to fully respect their respective obligations under the Road Map. The disturbing announcement of thousands of new housing units and settlements in Gilo, Pisgat Ze'ev and Givat Hamatos and the decision to entrench West Bank outposts are not only illegal but run counter to Israel's declared commitment to a negotiated solution to a final status issues, including borders and Jerusalem, as the Under-Secretary-General emphasized in his briefing.

We are equally troubled by the upsurge in violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians. We also condemn the recent attacks against Israel Defense Forces personnel. We remain particularly concerned with the increase in demolitions of Palestinian homes and infrastructure. We call on the Government to fulfil its obligations under international law to protect Palestinian civilians and property in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Israelis and Palestinians have a unique opportunity to resume direct and meaningful negotiations and to finally settle all outstanding issues, paving the way for two independent States living in peace and security and fully integrated in their region. Let them not forfeit that opportunity.

The situation in Syria has continued to deteriorate since the last discussion in the Council on 4 October (see S/PV.6627). The risk of the ongoing violence and political crisis escalating into a fully-fledged civil war with severe implications for the region increases by the day. Thus, we believe that it is extremely urgent that the Security Council send a strong, clear and united message to Syria. The authorities' violent repression against its population must cease immediately and those responsible for human rights violations must be held accountable. We welcome the active engagement by the Arab League and urge President Al-Assad to respond in a positive and timely manner to that appeal.

Portugal remains fully committed to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Syria. Therefore, we once again call for an inclusive, credible and Syrian-led political process aimed at effectively addressing the legitimate aspirations of Syria's population.

Mr. Osorio (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of my Government, I wish first of all to convey our grief to the Government and people of Turkey on the recent tragedy that cost so many lives. We also convey our condolences to Saudi Arabia on the death of Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. I am very grateful to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for the interesting report on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, in which he describes to us a disturbing scene of confrontation that is very worrying.

In recent months, we have seen the renewed and ongoing expression of the rightful demand of peoples in defence of their freedoms and fundamental rights, which for so long have been ignored and violated. That clamour that has been spreading in the entire region must lead to the strengthening of democratic institutions.

We welcome the progress and the reforms that have already started to bear fruit, as in the case of Tunisia with the elections for the Constituent Assembly that took place this weekend. Likewise, we value the efforts made by the Egyptian people and Government towards an ordered democratic transition.

We can say the same about the new Libya that is now starting to take shape. Its people, masters of their destiny, have decisively marked out the path of freedom amid pain and suffering. The time has come for Libya's democracy, the rebuilding of its social

fabric, and the opportunity to lay the foundations for a stable and developing future. We wish its people every success in that task and offer our cooperation and support where they deem it appropriate.

We hope that in the case of Yemen, resolution 2013 (2011) adopted last week by the Council, along with the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council, will contribute to a national dialogue that is not only necessary but urgent for a harmonious coexistence that would lead to the strengthening of institutions and meet the rightful demand of its people.

A cause of concern continues to be the very serious situation in Syria and the ongoing use of violence. We call an end to the violent repression and confrontation and for reason and dialogue to prevail. Reforms must take place immediately and produce tangible results so that its people can benefit from them as soon as possible.

On the Palestinian question, for many years we have expressed our view clearly in favour of a comprehensive, structured and lasting solution on the basis of the principles of the United Nations Charter and the noble goals of international peace and security. We understand and support the aspiration of the Palestinian people to have a State. We therefore reiterate that we support the goal of establishing a viable Palestinian State living in peace alongside Israel, with defined, secure and internationally recognized borders. However, it must be the result of an agreement that guarantees coexistence between those two peoples.

Fully convinced of that, we once again underscore that negotiation is the only possible and robust path to achieve that objective. Ending the settlement activities that we have always condemned, as well as less threatening language as a result, we hope, of the recent release of prisoners, will contribute to that.

We support the Quartet statement on the Middle East of 23 September because we believe it to be a concrete proposal that may bear fruit in so far as the parties accept the set timeline. We hope that the parties manage to agree a viable agenda and clear negotiating terms at the meeting to take place on 26 October.

In the context of that initiative, the Colombian Government contributed to the invitation to dialogue as a result of the Quartet's proposal through direct and discreet actions of President of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos Calderón and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who have had individual exchanges with the senior officials of Israel and Palestine. It entailed discreet good offices promoting dialogue and understanding since we believe the time has come to firm up a peace process.

Palestinian children and young people have the right to grow up in hope. The new generations of Israelis deserve to enjoy peaceful relations with their Arab neighbours. We must all do our best to ensure that that noble becomes a reality and that we find peace.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Nigeria.

My first thoughts must be to express our profound condolences to the Government and people of Turkey for the grave loss of lives following an earthquake, and to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing of Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

My delegation utterly condemns the senseless grenade attack in downtown Nairobi yesterday that caused numerous civilian injuries.

I wish very much to thank Mr. Pascoe for his very useful and comprehensive briefing on the current situation in the Middle East.

It is clearly evident from the various opinions expressed during this debate that the situation in the Middle East remains not only sensitive but also complex and daunting. Indeed, the mixed reaction to the application for membership of the United Nations by the Palestinian Authority illustrates the complex challenges in the path of closure on that issue.

Yet, it is undeniable that progress is imperative. The most tangible means of achieving progress is for all of us to take genuine and concerted action to bring the parties to the negotiating table, seizing the momentum offered by recent developments, including the statements of Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas at the General Assembly committing to peace (see A/66/PV.19), the statement of the Middle East Quartet, and the prisoner swap that saw the release of Gilad Shalit and brought freedom to over 1,000 Palestinians.

Nigeria views the Quartet statement proposing a new timetable for reaching a peace agreement before

the end of 2012 as a credible attempt to reopen the stalled talks. The parties should embrace the proposal as a basis for substantive engagement to bridge their differences over common and status issues. Indeed, the 26 October meeting in Jerusalem between the Quartet envoys and Israeli and Palestinian officials offers an opportunity for the parties to develop an agenda for the negotiations. We reiterate that direct talks remain vital to fostering good and normal relations between the two neighbours and for sustaining peace in the Middle East long after the two-State solution has been realized.

Let me affirm unequivocally that Nigeria believes in a two-State solution as the best option for resolving the protracted conflict in the Middle East, consistent with the numerous resolutions of the General Assembly and the Council. In recognizing the State of Palestine 27 years ago, we were certain then that the Palestinian Authority had achieved a high degree of institutional performance that is sufficient for independent statehood, and we are even more certain now. Indeed, the people of Palestine deserve the right to live in freedom and dignity and to enjoy the full benefits and privileges of statehood.

In the two-State solution matrix, we must acknowledge that the independent State of Israel deserves the recognition of its neighbours. Israel has the right to existence as a peaceful and secure country without the threat of annihilation.

Achieving two viable States will require the parties to take a number of specific actions. They must now find and strengthen their common bonds and renew their commitment to engage in negotiations based on mutual trust, and without preconditions.

Israel must take concrete steps to freeze all settlement-related activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It must avoid military incursions into Gaza and ease the blockade of the territory. In the same vein, Palestinian leaders must deal with militancy and actions that endanger Israel's security, including firing rockets into southern Israel. They must also utilize only lawful channels to transport people, goods and materials out of Gaza.

Nigeria will continue to maintain close relations with both Israel and Palestine. We will also continue to support all efforts that can lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We believe that the Security Council should be consistent and remain an impartial peace broker whose efforts must encourage Israel and Palestine to return to direct negotiations.

With respect to Lebanon, we support its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We welcome the progress being made by Prime Minister Najib Mikati's Administration and its commitment to the implementation of Council resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004), as well as other international obligations. We urge Israel to halt further incursions into Lebanese territory. The parties must maintain calm along the Blue Line.

On Syria, we remain concerned about the deteriorating security, human rights and humanitarian conditions in the country. We encourage the Syrian authorities to implement the promised reforms, address the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and engage in genuine, credible dialogue with the opposition. Nigeria will continue to work with other Council members to achieve peace and stability in Syria.

I now resume my function as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): On behalf of the States members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), I would like to begin by expressing our condolences and deep sympathy to the Government and people of Turkey on the tragic loss of life due to the earthquake that hit eastern Turkey yesterday. I would also like to offer the Movement's condolences and sympathy to the Government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for their great loss in the passing away of His Royal Highness Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud after a long life of achievement for his country, his region and the world at large.

I have the pleasure of addressing the Security Council today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement at this critical juncture in the Security Council's dealings with the situation in the Middle East. I would like to start by expressing the Movement's appreciation for today's briefing by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. The Non-Aligned Movement believes that the international community must renew its resolve to uphold its longstanding commitment to realizing a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, on the basis

of international law and the well-known terms of reference of the peace process.

There is an international consensus that we must reach the endgame, the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital — the core of a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. It is regrettable that all serious efforts to date by international and regional parties, including the last Quartet statement of 23 September, to resume and advance direct negotiations on the Palestinian track towards that objective have failed. This is mainly due to the lack of clear parameters for the negotiations and the insistence of Israel, the occupying Power, on continuing to illegally, unilaterally and aggressively change the situation on the ground. Such actions belie Israel's claims that it accepts the Quartet statements and that it is indeed acting in good faith to end this conflict.

It is worth mentioning that around the same time last year, many of us had high hopes for the new round of final status negotiations, which began in early September 2010 under the direct auspices of United States President Barack Obama, with the participation of the Quartet, Egypt and Jordan, with the goal of reaching an agreement within one year. Yet the negotiations collapsed just a few weeks later, due to Israel's refusal to renew the moratorium on settlement activities, cease its illegal settlement campaign and abide by clear parameters for negotiations to achieve a just and final solution.

The persistence of such behaviour on the part of Israel and its refusal to commit to the internationally endorsed parameters for a two-State solution cast a dark shadow of doubt over its professed intentions. Instead, they reinforce the belief that Israel's insistence on the negotiation path is merely for the sake of negotiations and not to actually reach any comprehensive peace settlement.

It is highly condemnable that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to pursue its illegal settlement activities, and many other illegal policies and practices, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Such illegal actions undermine peace efforts and are the main obstacle to efforts to resume negotiations, making it nearly impossible to realize a two-State solution on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders. Recent announcements regarding the establishment of thousands more settlement units, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem, the continued Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes and properties, and devious attempts by the Israeli Government to legitimize its illegitimate settlement scheme are the true measure of Israel's alleged commitment to the peace process and a two-State solution.

All indications at present — from provocative declarations to accelerated construction on the ground to the continued revocation of Palestinian residency rights — are that Israel continues to choose settlement over peace and to choose occupation and conflict at the expense of the future of both peoples and the region as a whole.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains firm in its condemnation of Israel's illegal settlement policies and practices, stressing that all such unlawful attempts to alter the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remain rejected and unrecognized by the international community.

The fact that a majority of NAM member States co-sponsored the draft resolution presented to the Security Council earlier this year (S/2011/24) that called for the immediate cessation of all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory — as outlined in relevant letters addressed by the Chair of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement to the President of the Council — reflects the international position on this most critical issue. The Non-Aligned Movement regrets that the Security Council did not adopt the draft resolution, as we had hoped and expected.

The Movement therefore reiterates its call for the Council to be resolute in demanding that Israel abide by its legal obligations. Moreover, the Movement believes that calls for compliance must be backed by credible action, which is incumbent upon this Council in light of its duties under the Charter and given the fact that the occupying Power is continuing to deliberately obstruct the attainment of peace and security in our region.

Israeli impunity must no longer be tolerated. Israel must be called upon to abide forthwith by all of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Road Map. That includes an immediate cessation of all settlement activities and full respect for the international

consensus on the issue, including the calls from the United Nations, NAM, the European Union, the Quartet and all other concerned international and regional bodies and actors.

The Non-Aligned Movement emphasizes the need to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to lift fully its illegal blockade, in accordance with its obligations under international law, Council resolution 1860 (2009) and all other relevant United Nations resolutions. The Movement reiterates that this unacceptable and unsustainable situation must end. The unresolved crisis continues to pose serious repercussions on international efforts to promote peace and continues to inflict deep suffering on the Palestinian people.

In that connection, the Movement reemphasizes the need for the reconstruction of Gaza, and calls on Israel to open all of its crossing points with Gaza and allow for the sustained and regular movement of persons and goods, including the import of essential reconstruction materials, which includes those necessary for the long overdue reconstruction of United Nations facilities and the schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and normal commercial flows. NAM also reiterates the need to empower UNRWA with all financial and human support necessary to undertake its mission effectively.

NAM welcomes the prisoner swap deal under Egyptian auspices that led to the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in exchange for more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees. NAM strongly condemns the continued detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli jails, where ill-treatment and torture are widely used.

It is the conviction of the members of the Movement, as stated in the special declaration adopted by the NAM ministerial conference in Bali in May, that those prisoners, who include children and women, should be immediately released and proper international inspection of their current condition should be a priority for the international community, particularly the Security Council and the Human Rights Council.

There were three main developments during the last few months. The first one was the historic speech given by President Abbas on 23 September in the General Assembly Hall. The second development was the agreement on Palestinian national reconciliation carried out under the auspices of Egypt, the core pillar of which was the return of power to the people through legislative and presidential elections within a year. The third development is the fact that to date, more than 130 countries have recognized the State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, including more than 100 members of the Movement, and they comprise more than the two-thirds majority of the General Assembly. Those three major developments, coupled with the recognition of all major international organizations and institutions including the United Nations, the World Bank and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, that Palestinian institutions are more than ready for statehood, clearly indicate that the dream of a Palestinian State is closer than ever to becoming a reality.

Indeed, there is unanimous conviction that Israel's respect for its obligations is imperative for the resumption of direct negotiations towards achieving the two-State solution on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. The international community must exert all efforts to compel Israel to abide by its obligations and commitments forthwith and to resume final status negotiations based on clear parameters that would include: cessation of all settlement activities, an agreed timeframe that recognizes the urgency of the matter and the 4 June 1967 borders as the foundation and starting point for negotiations, as set out by President Obama in his 19 May speech and as supported by the entire international community.

In so saying, the Movement stresses the utmost importance of the efforts of the international community and the United Nations and of a credible negotiation process for bringing an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, as well as the achievement of an independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Turning now to Lebanon, the NAM condemns Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanese sovereignty and the recurrence of serious breaches to Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). The Movement calls on all concerned parties to implement fully Security

Council resolution 1701 (2006) in order to end the current fragility and avoid the recurrence of hostilities.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken, or to be taken, by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as the Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null, void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Tarawneh (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today we are experiencing an Arab renewal that seeks realization of its hopes and aspirations, rejects the current situation and calls for a better future with dignity. After the current stage, the most pressing issue on the way forward will require attention to the Arab peoples' pride and sources of indignation that will need to be resolved. I refer, in particular, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has lasted far too long. In fact, the calls of the Arab Spring are for justice and non-discrimination will not accept that Israel or any other party remain above the law or international legitimacy.

It is absolutely unacceptable that Israel would continue to build settlements, thus undermining the efforts to settle the conflict based on the two-State solution and the 1967 borders. As long as short-term political gains retain priority over long-term strategic interests, Israel will remain incapable of building a better future for its people. Political decision makers in Israel need therefore to promote broader strategic interests rather than short-term interests. Today, more than ever, it is necessary for Israeli decision makers to consider the future and free their foreign policy from a siege-based mindset in order to establish good-neighbourly relationships based on equality.

Jordan confirms its support for Palestine's application to full membership as an independent State on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That request was made to the United Nations after Israel had impeded all international and regional efforts towards a resumption of negotiations and had denied the negotiations any substance due to its settlement activities and its refusal to negotiate on the basis of the 1967 borders.

Jordan also reaffirms its support for a final solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that addresses all final status issues, including the issues of settlements, Jerusalem, refugees, borders and water, within specific timeframes.

Jordan believes that recognition of the Palestinian State within the United Nations is neither a substitute for direct negotiations nor is it aimed at delegitimizing Israel, for such recognition of the Palestinian State would leave five points of the final status negotiations pending, which means that the conflict would continue without being fully addressed.

Jordan therefore believes that the latest statement of the Quartet is clear and creates a good opportunity for returning to the negotiating table, as long as there is full respect without conditions for its substantive contents or without any reservations that could deny any meaning to the negotiations. The United Nations and the international community, as well as the influential parties, must take action to bring pressure to bear on Israel to ensure that it complies with the dozens of resolutions that reaffirm the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination on its own national territory, including East Jerusalem, based on the 1967 borders. There must also be a comprehensive, just settlement of the issue of Palestinian refugees, without which there can be no peaceful settlement.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia): Thank you, Madame President, for the opportunity to speak at this meeting.

Allow me, first, to thank all the delegations that have expressed their sympathies and condolences to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the passing of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince. We appreciate their support and solidarity. I would also like to extend our condolences to the people and Government of Turkey for their losses caused by the earthquake that struck their country.

I further want to point out that we align ourselves fully with the statement made by the Egyptian Ambassador on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

At the outset, I am honoured to express my gratitude to you for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

This meeting is being held at a time when the Palestinian people are paying for the reluctance of the international community and the Security Council to deter Israel from its actions against the Palestinian people, such as killing, displacement, imprisonment, blockades, annexation of land, confiscation of property and plundering the wealth of Palestine. All those actions subject the Palestinian people to further intense oppression and torture, with the goal of forcing them to surrender and despair.

The Israeli Government persists in its intransigence, refusing to give the Palestinians their basic rights. It proceeds with its illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, riding roughshod over international will, countries' condemnations and United Nations resolutions issued in this regard. Israeli settlements surround most cities of the West Bank and seize nearly half of their water resources, making it difficult for any Palestinian Government to work effectively.

Furthermore, it is unethical that the occupation forces impose a blockade on an entire people and continue their settlement activities, secure from any accountability. Most of the countries gathered here, including the permanent members of the Security Council, have issued individual statements against the continuation of Israeli settlement activities. What they need to do now is to take an international, collective stand that clearly reflects that existing unanimity. It is high time for Israel to realize that it cannot continue to exempt itself from full compliance with the rules of international law-based behaviour.

The "Apartheid Wall" embodies irrefutable evidence of the extent of the Israeli occupying Power's persistence in violating United Nations resolutions, particularly General Assembly resolution 181 (II), on the pretext of legitimate self-defence. In fact, the true purpose of building the wall is to change the facts on ground and to evict the Palestinian people, prevent East Jerusalem from escaping Israeli sovereignty and secure control over water resources, in addition to establishing as many settlements as possible for the settlers. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterates that security can be achieved neither by building symbols of oppression and occupation nor through the unjustified use of military force. Rather, security can be achieved by respecting human rights and the rule of law.

The situation in the besieged Gaza Strip constitutes another factor that exacerbates the problems that the Palestinian people face. In fact, the Gaza Strip has become one big prison, as a result of the unjust blockade imposed by Israel against the Palestinians, preventing them from exercising their natural rights and accessing their necessary services and needs. Meanwhile, a generation of Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip are born and raised with nothing in their minds but devastation, destruction and the world's failure to support them in exercising their natural rights — which are the same as those of any other children in the world. Therefore, in this Chamber, we urge the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities by lifting the siege on Gaza and opening the crossings that lead to it.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia calls upon the international community to compel Israel to take the necessary procedures to protect the holy sites and places of worship in Palestine, particularly in Jerusalem. In addition, the Kingdom urges the international community to force Israel to release the remaining Palestinian prisoners, some of whom have not seen their families for decades.

The Kingdom would not make such demands without extending a hand of peace and proving its commitment to a just and comprehensive peace. In this vein, the Kingdom introduced a peace initiative that was adopted by all Arab States in 2002, known as the Arab Peace Initiative. That Initiative reiterates the Arabs' commitment to achieving a just and comprehensive peace based on the rules of international law. Nevertheless, we have not seen any similar commitment from Israel. Rather, Israel has evaded its duties and responsibilities and continued its many violations against the Palestinian people and their rights.

We therefore, now more than ever before, call upon the Security Council to support the Palestinian people and recognize their State, within the borders of 4 June 1967, and with Jerusalem as its capital. Israel and the children and people of Palestine must be made to see clearly that the international community has

agreed, albeit belatedly, to support the Palestinian cause by granting Palestine full membership in the United Nations. We call upon Israel to withdraw fully from all the Arab territories occupied in 1967.

In conclusion, peace in the Middle East requires the commitment of all States of the region to be guaranteed security. We cannot talk about peace in the Middle East without referring to the recently discovered plot to assassinate the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United States of America. According to the evidence provided by the competent authorities of the United States, it is clear that the perpetrators who planned and supported the implementation of this heinous crime either work for the Iranian Government or are affiliated with it.

The Kingdom reiterates its denunciation and condemnation of any attempt to tamper with its security or assault any of its citizens or officials. The Kingdom will not stand idle in response to those who play foul with its security. Furthermore, the Kingdom reaffirms its full cooperation with the international community and the Security Council, which is entrusted with maintaining international peace and security, to ensure that anyone involved in that plot, whether State or individual, be held accountable.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.20.